7: Perham S-4 (no date)1948
MP5 Amhara MP5

THE GOVERNMENT OF ETHIOPIA

by

MARGERY PERHAM

[title page]

[pp. to 261 inclusive not processed]

New York
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
1948

7: Perham S-4 (no date)1948
MP5 Amhara MP5

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE PROVINCES: GENERAL

PROVINCIAL DIVISIONS BEFORE 1935

635 Ethiopia has been presented hitherto from the centre and the provinces have been viewed outwards from Addis Ababa, the headquarters of the Emperor and the main scene of his reforms. To understand the difficulties that lay, and that still lie, before him in extending these reforms, it is necessary, in so far as the scanty and capriciously distributed information allows, to make some general study of provincial administration. The judicial and military aspects have already been discussed. As the conditions in the conquered provinces of the south differ in important features from those of the north, they will be treated separately, though it should be remembered that the north, as the ancient realm of the governing people, provides the dominant type of provincial administration and that the south represents a modification of this rather than an independent system.

For administrative purposes the country was divided into a large number of provinces and districts. The distinction between the two was not always clear, and their numbers and boundaries seem to have been altered frequently. The units were of uneven size and some of them appear to have followed either historical or geographical divisions or lines of tribal distribution. The great traditional northern divisions were modified by the later arrangements, but they were not obliterated to the same extent as were the old French provinces under Napoleon's administrative pattern.[1] Shoa, Gojjam, and Tigré, with its peculiar language, stood out from the rest for their size and importance, but

[1] No official maps of Ethiopia before 1935 are available, and map 1 has been made by F. de Halpert. It was necessary to include this in addition to the map of the 1945 divisions, not only because of its historical interest, but also because it contains some names of historical or tribal importance which have been dropped out of the new, simplified map.

[pp 1-261 not processed]

7: Perham S-4 (no date)1948
MP5 Amhara MP5

many of the smaller units retained, like them, much of their old historical and cultural identity.

The provinces do not fall very easily into administrative categories. The deepest distinction is that which has just been mentioned between the dominant Christian provinces of the old Ethiopia and those of the south which were, in the main, conquered by the Shoan dynasty during the second half of the last century. The dividing line runs approximately along the Blue Nile and across the middle of the modern Shoa, a little to the north of the capital. The region around the capital, though it lay just south of this line, may be regarded as having, since the reign of Sahla Selassié (1813), been progressively assimilated to Amharic society. In the vast area north of the line, below the structure of imperial power and that of the dominating and shifting ruling families there lay, still largely intact, the variegated social design of the Tigré and Amhara groups, closely interwoven with that of the ancient church and sanctioned by long custom. South of this line were Muslim and pagan people, many newly conquered, some of them partially disintegrated and dispossessed by their conquest, and all subject to a far more direct rule under the Shoan Emperor and his agents than was possible in the north. In both groups of provinces there were exceptional areas such as those of the northern Gallas, but it will be more convenient to give the Gallas a chapter to themselves as part of the south. The non-Galla southern provinces must be sub-divided into three groups, the Sidamo Hamites, the negro, and those Danakil and Somali regions, where the semi-desert nature of the country and the nomadic life of the tribes frustrated effective control by the Amharas. The northern provinces are sufficiently homogeneous for us to consider them, in very general terms, as a whole. A discussion of the administration of the provinces must be preceded by an attempt to assess the numbers and distribution of the people.

The main facts of the ethnology of the region have appeared in their place in the historical introduction, but it may be useful to bring together here some of these scattered facts. We saw that a mainly Hamitic (or Cushitic) population, with negro fringes and pockets, was dominated in successive southward moving stages by those northern groups which had been mastered and stimulated by Semitic emigrants from Arabia, and how this mixed Semitic-Hamitic people had gradually spread its domination over the northern half of the present boundaries to make the Ethiopian state and nation. It has been recounted how Christianity came in the fourth century and how the great movement of Galla peoples from the east and south-east, aided by the Muslim invasions of the sixteenth century, flooded into large areas of Ethiopia.

7: Perham S-4 (no date)1948

MP5 Amhara MP5

THE GOVERNMENT OF ETHIOPIA

175 563 In the nineteenth century, as will be recounted in some detail in the chapter on the southern provinces, the Ethiopians, and especially the Shoans, struck back and overran an immense area inhabited by Gallas, Somalis, non-Semiticized Hamites, and negroes in the south.

THE POPULATION

162 No census has ever been taken in Ethiopia and we cannot, therefore, know either the total of population within her boundaries or how to allocate the numbers to the several races, religions, and regions. All estimates are therefore nothing better than more or less informed guesses. To show the divergences in these guesses, a well-informed British consul writing in 1932 gave 5,500,000 as his figure,[1] whereas, since the liberation, a semi-official Ethiopian journal claims 12,000,000 to 13,000,000. A recent official statement by the ecclesiastical authorities claims 10,000,000 Ethiopian Christians.[2]

Special attention must be paid to the estimates of the Italians. As neighbours, adversaries and, for a short time, rulers of Ethiopia, they have had more reason and opportunity than other people to attempt such calculations.

The following estimates, obviously in very round numbers, are the official Italian figures. They cover the whole of Italian East Africa and it will therefore be necessary to consult Map 2 at the end of the book in order to see the relationship of this area with Ethiopia proper.

Province.	Population
Shoa	500,000
Eritrea	1,000,000
Amhara	1,000,000
Harar	1,600,000
Galla-Sidamo	1,600,000
Somalia	1,300,000
	7,000,000[3]

The following figures for the same area, published in the *Guida* of 1938, give the racial distribution.

[1] Makereth, p. 5. [2] *Herald*, 1 July 1946.

[3] *Annuario dell'Africa Orientale Italiana*, Rome, 1938–9, p. 597.

THE PROVINCES: GENERAL

	Population
Abyssinians (including Agau and Beja)	2,400,000
Gallas	2,350,000
Somalis	1,400,000
Sidamo groups	1,400,000
Afar-Saho (of Danakil districts)	150,000
Negroes	1,000,000
Asiatics and Europeans	100,000[1]
	7,600,000

From both these sets of figures the relatively accurate figures for Eritrea of 757,000,[2] and for Italian Somaliland of 1,000,000,[3] may be deducted, leaving a total for Ethiopia proper of 5,243,000 according to the *Annuario* and 5,843,000 according to the *Guida*.

The British Military Administration in Ethiopia gave the number of 7,000,000 for the total population but did not say upon what calculations this figure was based.[4]

Zoli gives the following classifications for language and race for Ethiopia alone.

Language		Race	
Amhara	1,900,000	Abyssinian	2,100,000
Tigré	400,000	Galla	2,350,000
Oromo (Galla)	2,000,000	Somali	450,000
Somali	450,000	Sidamo	200,000
Sidamo	200,000	Afar	50,000
Afar (Danakil)	50,000	Negro	850,000
Miscellaneous	1,000,000		
	6,000,000		6,000,000[5]

One point of interest in comparing these latter is that they give an estimate—a highly speculative one—of the degree to which the Gallas have become assimilated to the Amharic culture as shown by their adoption of this language. We may note that Zoli estimates that forty different languages are spoken in Ethiopia, but most of these belong

[1] *Guida*, p. 400. [2] Longrigg, *op. cit.*, Appendix C.
[3] This estimate was taken from *Whitaker*. [4] Cmd. 6589/1945.
[5] Zoli, *op. cit.*, pp. 12–13.

7: Perham S-4 (no date)1948
MP5 Amhara MP5

162 to very small groups in the south-west. His figures for the religions of the country have already been given.[1]

A very rough regional distribution by another Italian writer is as follows:

The original Ethiopian provinces	2,500,000–2,800,000
Galla and Sidamo areas	1,500,000–2,000,000
Harar	1,000,000
Somaliland	300,000
Danakil region	50,000
The non-Amharic north-west	100,000
The south-west (negroid regions)	600,000

This gives us a total of between 6,000,000 and 7,000,000.[2] But Almagia, like other authorities, offers this estimate in very tentative terms.

Finally, we may give de Castro's estimate of racial percentages.

[563]

Ethiopians	32·6
Gallas	42·7
Sidamo and Arab-crossed people of the south-western highlands	10·1
Somalis	6·0
Negroid and Nilotic negroes	6·6
Danakil groups	2·0
	100·0[3]

Three main points arise from a study of these various estimates.

One is that the Italian figures for the total population are very much lower than those recently mentioned by Ethiopians. An application made by the writer for the official Ethiopian figure produced a negative reply. This demographic difficulty may be one, among others, which has held up the publication of a long-promised official handbook for Ethiopia.

A second interesting feature of the estimates is that the true Ethiopian stock is almost certainly in a minority and that it is most likely to strengthen its position further, at least as the first stage, by continuing the assimilation of the Gallas which has already begun.

Thirdly, the figures repeat the impression given by the Geographical Survey of the concentration of the population upon the highlands, and the numerical insignificance of the groups inhabiting the low-lying regions of the east and south-east.

[1] See above, p. 103. [2] Almagia, *op. cit.*, pp. 196–7.
[3] de Castro, *L'Etiopia*, p. 301.

7: Perham S-4 (no date)1948
MP5 Amhara MP5

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE NORTHERN PROVINCES: GENERAL

THE EMPEROR AND THE GOVERNOR

In the fifth chapter of this book some description was given of the character of the Ethiopian monarchy. This survey was made, as it were, from the throne. To complete the picture it is necessary to review the imperial power from the standpoint of the provinces. 643

We have seen that the Emperor, however low his authority may have fallen in fact from time to time, was always recognized in theory as absolute, the King of Kings, the supreme leader of the army, the head of the church, and the disposer of all lands and offices. It is this last facet of the kingship that must now be examined: it should give further insight into the manner in which the rulers of Ethiopia were able to rise to the high eminence reserved for them by this conservative and religious people. It was the periodic assertion of the royal power under strong rulers which prevented the rise of anything approaching the powerful hereditary lordships of medieval Europe.

It is, indeed, remarkable that this should have been so. It was the primitive economy which in medieval Europe made it difficult for a king to accumulate and control the material resources required for the upkeep of a central army and a central bureaucracy. Yet, in Ethiopia, this condition was greatly aggravated by geography and was prolonged by her political isolation right into this century. This meant that, although the Ethiopian provincial rases were never able to establish for long their position as over-mighty subjects, the Emperors upon their side were unable to consolidate, century after century, the authority of the imperial government. The two elements remained in a permanent tension; the balance swayed from one decade to another, and through

7: Perham S-4 (no date)1948
MP5 Amhara MP5

643 the 600 years or more of which we have reliable knowledge, neither side until this century seems to have gained upon the other.

635 The crucial question was the appointment of the provincial governor. In theory his position was entirely dependent upon the Emperor. In all polities to which the word feudal can, in however general a sense, be applied, land tenure and land tribute were closely allied with the holding of office. It was the constant effort of the Emperors to insist both upon this connection and upon their right to grant and to withdraw both office and tenure. It is more convenient, however, so long as the complementary nature of the two is borne in mind, to deal first with the office of provincial governor and then with land-tenure and tribute.

Most European kings of the middle ages were obliged to recognize the right of great feudal nobles to the hereditary succession of large territorial lordships which were sometimes linked with high central offices and were, in practice, impossible to divide from great provincial powers. In Ethiopia, by contrast, few instances could be quoted in which provincial governors succeeded in passing on their positions and the lands which went with them for more than three or four generations. The most striking exception—one that goes far to prove the rule—was that of the ruler of Wag who, retaining in this conservative country something of the divinity which once had hedged his family, that of the original Zagwé dynasty which ousted the Solomonian line from its imperial authority, was allowed very special privileges. It is probable that with most ruling families, the laxity with regard to marital relations and legitimate succession, which, as we saw, obscured the imperial genealogy, was a deterrent to the building up of strong lineages.

The keynote is struck in one of the earliest examples, that given by Alvarez, of the great office of *Bahr-nagash*, ('king of the sea', i.e. the northern marches province near the coast). 'For in our time, which was a stay of six years', he writes, 'there were here four *Barnagais*, that is to say, when we arrived Dori was *Barnagais*; he died, and at his death the crown came to Bulla, his son, a youth of ten to twelve years of age, by order of the Prester John.[1] When they crowned him he was at once summoned to court, and while he was at the Court Prester John took away his sovereignty and gave it to a noble gentleman. . . . This man held it two years, and they took from him his lordship and made him the greatest lord of the Court . . . and the lordship of *Barnagais* was given to another lord. . . .'[2] And again, 'The Prester John deposes them and appoints them whenever he pleases, with or without cause. . . . I saw great lords turned out of their lordships, and others put into them,

[1] I.e. the Emperor. [2] Alvarez, pp. 52–3.

7: Perham S-4 (no date)1948
MP5 Amhara MP5

and I saw them together, and they appeared to be good friends. (God knows their hearts.)'[1] 'And it is so usual', wrote d'Almeyda in the next century, 'for the Emperor to chop, change, and take . . . the lands any man has and to bestow them on another, that it is never thought much of, and very often one plows, another sows, and a third reaps.'[2] Yet practice was never quite the same as theory. The Emperor's claim to make grants of land and office depending solely upon his will waxed and waned according to the changing balance of the social and political forces. Thus we find Ludolphus, while stating the general rule, remarking that there were some prefectures which the Emperor would have to bestow upon another member of the same family. He names six of these, including that of the *Bahr-nagash* and the *Wag-Shum*. Ludolphus has more to tell of the Emperor's views on this question. 'Moreover they presume that Hereditary Dignity is an obstacle to Virtue; that Men are more certainly made, than born great; and that they will prove more faithful, whom they have raised from the Dust, than such as claim their fortunes from their Ancestors.'[3]

To trace the changing movements in this tug-of-war would require a recapitulation of the involved internal struggles, battles of kites and crows, which fill the chronicles and the political details of which are no more interesting than those of our Wars of the Roses. Only a few important phases need be picked out. From d'Almeyda and Ludolphus we must pass on to the eighteenth century, when the royal power fell very low. Ras Mikael of Tigré, who dominates Bruce's story as Satan dominates Paradise Lost, was not a man an Emperor could dismiss; on the contrary he himself dismissed, and, indeed, murdered, more than one Emperor. At this time, even the Gallas of Damot could insist upon the son of the former Galla governor succeeding to the governorship and they killed the Emperor's uncle who was sent to take over the province.[4] The kingdom of Shoa, as we saw in the historical introduction, was all but independent, and though its rulers paid lip service to the King of Kings in Gondar, none of these dared challenge the solid power and hereditary succession of this dynasty.

The Galla mayors of the palace at Gondar struggled to raise the power of the decadent Solomonian rulers. One of these attempts to curb the growth of hereditary succession to offices and lands and to make a bid for the favour of the people against their lords, is of special interest in our context. Ras Gugsa passed the following decree in 1800:

'The land belongs to God. Man has only its usufruct. He fertilizes it by his labours: he passes: it swallows him and grows green again in

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 93. [2] Tellez, p. 63. [3] Ludolphus, p. 235.
[4] Jones and Monroe, pp. 122–3.

7: Perham S-4 (no date)1948
MP5 Amhara MP5

175 the sun. Who then dares to call himself the owner of something stronger than himself? Holders of fiefs: lords of Provinces, listen: there is no more hereditary suzerainty. God alone has possession always. He gives sovereign right to whom he pleases. He has given it to me. . . . I am master of the soil. . . . Noble ladies and lords, holders of fiefs, present yourselves! I give rank and investiture. . . . Labourers, labour! Merchants, continue your traffic! It is I who am your might and your strength.'[1] It is said that the immediate effect of this decree was to turn most of the lesser nobility into soldiers of fortune, but this might have happened in any case in the disorders of the early nineteenth century.

Ras Ali, whom Plowden found in power, ruling with a puppet king, showed the monarchy at its weakest; Ras Oubié of Tigré was at least his equal and brooked no interference, though he sent in a token tribute. Even Ras Ali, in the Emperor's name, still claimed 'the right of appointing all other chiefs of provinces and officers of every kind at his will and pleasure'.[2] But many great families, his equals by birth, had their own armies, and in appointing a governor of a province he was obliged to be attentive to the claims of great families who, from hereditary influence, must be either rulers or rebels in their respective districts.[3]

After the disorders and decline of nearly a century, Theodore tried to revive the imperial authority. His methods were characteristic; they showed the vigour and genius which was so tragically ruined by his violence. 'The arduous task', wrote Plowden, 'of breaking the power of the great feudal chiefs—a task in Europe achieved only during the reigns of many consecutive kings—he has commenced by chaining almost all who were dangerous. . . . He has placed the soldiers of the different provinces under the command of his own trusty followers, to whom he has given high titles, but no power to judge or punish; thus, in fact, creating generals in place of feudal chieftains more proud of their birth than of their monarchy, and organizing a new nobility, a legion of honour dependent on himself, and chosen especially for their daring and fidelity.'[4] Even the *W'ag-Shum* was not spared from seizure.

Theodore's successor, John, for all his great military ability, had at times to treat the kings of Shoa and Gojjam almost as equals. Menelik, though never so violent as Theodore, was able in his prime—but only then—to exert his authority over the provincial governors. An official report of 1906 states that he could at any moment take away the territory of the highest ras and put him in chains without giving any reasons for his action. The extent and also the limits of his power in relation to the great ruling families of the north were shown in his treatment of

[1] Salviac, M. de, *Les Galla*, Paris, 1902, p. 37.
[2] Hotten, p. 116. [3] *Ibid.*, p. 181. [4] *Ibid.*, p. 235.

7: Perham S-4 (no date)1948
MP5 Amhara MP5

Gojjam when its king, Takla Haimanot, died in 1901. He wished to break up this large kingdom, but he did so only partially, leaving the eastern part to the son of the dead king. He also made it a habit to keep powerful chiefs waiting about at court, a favourite method of French kings and one that Theodore had applied to him in his own youth. The *Wag-Shum* was again deprived of his ancient hereditary succession by the Empress Taitu, in favour of her own nominee; but the *Shum* was later restored. As Menelik's physical power declined, so did his control until, during his last years, the provincial governors again became largely independent. Imperial authority over the governors declined still further under the unstable Lij Yasu, and was only very gradually restored in a new form by Haile Selassié. 175

We have seen that even the present Emperor had to pay some attention to the hereditary position of great families in those northern regions which had a traditional jealousy of Shoa and in which opposition and rebellion were most likely to appear. In his early days as Regent the provincial governors still remained very independent. Ras Hailu, for instance, did not come near the capital for years. Provincial tribute was very low. Chiefs were allowed to rule the country with which their family had been associated until some misdeed or act of disloyalty brought deposition. Hence Haile Selassié confirmed Ras Hailu in his father's position in Gojjam, and punished his contumacy with disinheritance and imprisonment only later when he was strong enough for this action. Similarly he felt obliged to confirm Ras Seyum in his ancestral lordship of Tigré. It was the decision to grant Ras Seyum, at the expense of his cousin *Dejazmach* Haile Selassié Gugsa, the lion's share of the family lands, which threw the latter into the arms of the Italians in 1935. Ras Gugsa Wallié's position in the provinces of Lasta and Bagemdir was based upon family connections, and when he was killed during his rebellion in 1930 the substitution of Ras Kassa was appropriate because of his connection with the former rulers of Lasta through his mother. Ras Kassa's son was made governor of Bagemdir in 1942 in recognition, presumably, of the family connection.

The present Emperor himself might be given as the representative of a branch of the royal line which has held the great province of Harar since his father Ras Makonnen conquered it and was confirmed in its lordship by his cousin Menelik. The lands and governorship of this province were inherited by Makonnen's eldest son and, upon his death, went to the younger brother, Tafari. Though Lij Yasu, when he came of age, transferred this potential rival to a south-west province, Tafari had left behind him in Harar an army that was loyal to his house, and when the clash came it rallied to him and Lij Yasu lost his throne. 643 [635]

7: Perham S-4 (no date)1948
MP5 Amhara MP5

THE GOVERNMENT OF ETHIOPIA

[643] 635 Harar is now ruled over by the Emperor's second son. While it is clearly difficult to deduce constitutional rules from conflicts at this level, turning our glance to a lower one we may note that in addition to the few examples of continuity, many others could be given of frequent changes of governorship, even in the north, by both Menelik[1] and Haile Selassie. These would illustrate their ability to act upon these rights in this way, at those times in their reigns when they were strong enough to do so.

It is interesting to consider more closely the exact position as to the distribution of governorships on the eve of the Italian invasion. For convenience the south, which must be discussed in somewhat more detail later, has for this purpose been included with the north. According to an authoritative Italian writer, the number of provinces was thirty-two; of these, six might be regarded as being headed by governors of local hereditary status. They were Wag, Tigré (divided between two local notables), Wallaga, the small region of Beni-Shangul under local Muslim governors, and Salale under Ras Kassa. Eastern and southern Shoa was a royal dominion; Wallo, Harar, and Ogaden were also personal fiefs of the Emperor governed by his sons. The remaining twenty-one provinces were all under the Emperor's men, governors appointed by him from among his closest relatives and supporters, including a few of the 'new' younger and more progressive officials.[2] This analysis would suggest that, by the end of the first part of his reign, Haile Selassié, as far as appointments of governors were concerned, had succeeded in controlling very directly some two-thirds of the country.

631 635 Mr. de Halpert, however, in information supplied to the writer, is critical of these categories as being too exact. He points out that in the Ethiopia of 1935 it was almost impossible to say which division was a province and which a district. Tigré, Shoa, and Gojjam, as ancient kingdoms, were really subdivided into a number of administrative districts. He would also dispute the exact significance of some of the appointments. Without discussing these points in further detail, it may at least be assumed that the provinces and districts could be roughly divided into those that were more and those that were less closely under imperial control and that the former were the more numerous and were upon the increase.

THE OFFICE OF GOVERNOR

635 The governor then, according to theory, was appointed and dismissed

[1] Guèbrè Sellassié, vol. 2, p. 487.

[2] Zoli, 'L'Impero Italiano dell'Africa Orientale', *Bollettino della R. Societa Geografica Italiana*, series VII, vol. 1, no. 8, pp. 473–84.

7: Perham S-4 (no date)1948
MP5 Amhara MP5

by the Emperor and was his representative in the province. His exact title varied. He might rise to the height of that of *Negus*; he might be a ras. More frequently in recent years he held the next title in rank, that of *dejazmach*. He was the general of the provincial army, the judge and the administrator. He was paid no salary. He paid himself, his entourage, and his soldiers from the tribute of the province. On the pecuniary side, in addition to the tithes and other tribute, he collected the profits of justice and the tolls on the borders of his province. The tolls being collected from the merchants would be one of his few sources of cash, especially before this century.[1]

It has already been said that no estimate is possible of the proportion of tribute passed on by the governors to the Emperor. It seems probable, however, that where any tribute was paid the amount varied according to the arrangements made between the Emperor and the governor and probably also, from time to time, according to the needs and the power of the Emperor and the advisability of appeasing him with tribute. It is certain that large caravans taking rich gifts of cloth, horses, mules, and gold ceased long before this century to come in to the Emperor from any of the northern provinces.[2]

The governor, especially if he were a local grandee, was a very great man. The Ethiopians, like many other peoples, love the trappings of power. It was the ambition of most men to wear fine clothes and to have at least one or two slaves or servants to run beside the stirrup. The governors naturally aimed at reproducing as far as they could the style of the Emperor's palace. They lived at the highest level they could afford, each with a court of his own and a circle of officials of his own appointment, whose titles were current only in the province. When they gave out lands and offices to their followers they tried, like the Emperor, to prevent these becoming hereditary and aimed at unsettling their holders from time to time.[3] Ethiopians tended to gravitate round the households of a great man with its hospitality, its atmosphere of movement, of security and opportunity. The governor's headquarters would be crowded with supporters, suitors, the soldiers of his personal bodyguard, priests, musicians, jesters, servants, and slaves. Upon festivals he kept open house and like his Emperor gave great feasts of raw meat and mead. A description of the lavish hospitality of the Ras of Angote given in the sixteenth century[4] reads almost word for word the same as those of the entertainments described by other travellers 400 years later.

When a governor travelled, especially upon taking up or leaving his appointment, it was a serious affair for the country upon which he

[1] Rüppel, E., *Reise in Abessinien*, Frankfurt, 1838–40, vol. 2, p. 35.
[2] See above, pp. 191–3. [3] Hotten, pp. 145–6. [4] Alvarez, pp. 136–7.

635 lived in passing and upon which he could levy purveyance. His passage
661 was an affair of pomp, in which important ladies had to be considered and a retinue taken, which might swell to many hundreds of soldiers and servants with all their families, slaves, and transport animals. Such journeys were veritable expeditions, not to be undertaken lightly. A journey right across the country might take several weeks, and in parts the rains made travel laborious or impossible for some five months of the year. The difficulty of communication gave the governor an independence of which he made full use. Governors of ancient divisions with a tradition of autonomy and governors from the royal family were generally allowed to rule with little interference. In this century
[177 the main provincial capitals were connected with Addis Ababa by
206 telephone and this, with aeroplanes, which were just beginning to come
507] into use before 1935, were the first threats to the isolation of the governors, which has since, in most parts, been so greatly diminished by the Italian roads. The Emperor had his agents who kept a watch upon governors and reported upon their doings; this kind of espionage was a highly developed system in Ethiopia. The governors on their side kept representatives in the capital. But this did nothing to overcome what several observers have remarked as the besetting sin of Ethiopian administration, the refusal to take any constructive responsibility. Governors of the old school were mainly concerned with the conservation of their own power, the collection of their tribute, and the fulfilment of their military duties. It would have been quite outside their range of thought to initiate new ideas of reform or to put down time-honoured abuses. Some of the governors spent much of their time at Addis Ababa and their deputies tended to be even more conservative in their use of authority than their masters.

635 Although the emphasis here is upon administration, it must not be forgotten that the governor was historically and in Ethiopian eyes primarily a high military officer and his civil duties were no more than the necessary accompaniment of his command. He had—as was shown anew in 1935—to raise and lead his provincial army in war. Some description has, however, already been given of the army, and there will be no need to discuss it further in this chapter except in the next section in relation to land tenure.

622 THE VILLAGE CHIEF

We have seen that by 1935 it was rare for a great local landed potentate to hold the highest provincial office; in most instances this was held by the Emperor's nominees. But this was not the only link the Emperor

7: Perham S-4 (no date) 1948
MP5 Amhara MP5

claimed with the provinces. It was at a lower level that his official hierarchy was, in theory, in continuous contact with the regional and hereditary element. The governors' deputies and their assistants in the still smaller districts might or might not be local men, but when we come to the heads of villages or groups of villages we find that the leader and representative of the people and the lowest agent of the Emperor and his governor were united in the person of the *chiqa-shum*.

This officer was universal in Tigré, Amhara, and most of Galla country though in the latter this title was not always used. Because of his close association with the customary agrarian societies there were local variations in his status and duties. In general character and importance, even though the analogy is not exact, the *chiqa-shum* occupied something like the position of the Elizabethan justice of the peace. In his office central and local authority met. He was responsible to the governor's district chief for the proper performance by his own community of their duties and especially for their payments to the proper authorities of tithe and tax and of dues in kind and labour. He was the judge to whom, if wayside arbitration failed, the litigants would first apply. He would be present at local weddings; would preside at meetings of the village council, and would be especially concerned with all transfers or allocations of land and disputes about it. He would see that orders from the higher authorities were proclaimed by a crier in the village.

According to an Ethiopian account he is 'the officer of the district, living upon the soil as one joined to it'.[1] He is the agent of the Emperor. 'He will be an Amhara and may accuse even the Governor. If a man touches or strikes him, he (i.e. the striker) will not pay compensation, but all his goods will be confiscated.'[2] Coulbeaux defines him as 'le maire de la commune . . . tuteur, père même'. He manages the affairs of the village like his own, and his patriarchal authority is sacred. He is generally the genealogical chief of the community, and calls the village council together under a tree.[3] Certainly these village chiefs, representing continuity of tradition and the sedentary agricultural life, were the stabilizing factor in a system in which changing governors, roving armies, and a distant Emperor played the more dramatic, but often the more superficial, parts. This especially struck Plowden. 'There is in each village', he wrote, 'one hereditary officer that cannot be displaced on any pretence; and it is this institution alone that preserves some appearance of order in the absence of all written documents, amidst the whirl of revolutions and the rapid succession of dynasties and gover-

[1] Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 42. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 184. [3] Coulbeaux, vol. 1, pp. 35–6.

7: Perham S-4 (no date)1948
MP5 Amhara MP5

622 nors.'[1] An interesting confirmation of this comes from a later date: the British minister in 1939 reported that after two years of bitter experience the Italians found they could not run the country without the co-operation of the Ethiopians at the village level, and were trying to restore the village organization.

The Emperor claimed to appoint the *chiqa-shum* but we may assume that in this and in the other matters discussed in this chapter he intervened to do so when and where he had the power. The *shum* was generally too small a man to attract imperial attention and a strong governor would, without doubt, play his part in the matter. According to Krapf the *shum* was appointed by the governor at the request of the villagers [435] and paid twenty pieces of rock salt, then valued at one dollar, for the appointment which he held only for a year.[2] The choice, whether made by Emperor or governor, was clearly limited by the character of the office; its value depended upon the local status and representative capacity of the holder. In some communities the appointment might be for a period or even for life, but it was also a widespread custom in the north for the office to rotate yearly amongst the leading men of a few families, generally those whose prestige rested upon their descent from the family which founded the group. There were, of course, a number of privileges and perquisites in the form of gifts for the *shum*. There were differences in his official rewards; in some areas he got no more than exemption from taxes. In a vivid Ethiopian comment, 'he . . . pays tribute only with his legs, running up, and down to carry the orders of the Government'.[3] In other parts, however, it appears that he retained some proportion of the taxes he collected for the government. It would be very valuable if further investigation could be made into this obscure but all-important office and into the position which, after all that has happened since 1935, it holds to-day.

[1] Hotten, p. 157.
[2] Krapf, J. L., and Isenberg, C. W., *Journals*, 1843, p. 280.
[3] Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

7: Perham S-4 (no date)1948
MP5 Amhara MP5

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE NORTHERN PROVINCES: LAND TENURE AND TRIBUTE

THE GABAR

It is impossible to go any further with this discussion of provincial administration without some understanding of the Ethiopian methods of land tenure. The three strands, administration, tribute, and tenure, were closely twisted together and with them the fourth strand of military service, which we have already endeavoured to study separately. Unfortunately the whole subject is extremely complex. A few investigations have been made especially by Italian scholars, whose work has been mainly in the old Tigré province, part of which became Eritrea, but, as there are very wide varieties even within the northern provinces, seeming inconsistencies occur between the authorities.[1] The situation was at least as intricate as in early medieval England while

[1] Among the chief authorities upon this subject are:
1. P. Soleillet, *Voyages en Ethiopie*, Rouen, 1886.
2. E. de Felcourt, *L'Abyssinie*, Paris, 1911.
3. Rossini.
4. Cerulli.
5. Guèbrè Sellassié, especially Appendix xi by M. de Coppet, 'Landed Property in Shoa'.
6. A. Pollera, *Le popolazioni indigene dell'Eritrea*, Bologna, 1935.
7. de Castro, *L'Etiopia*.
8. G. P. Veroi, *Caratteri generali dell'economica dell'Impero*, Rome, 1937.
9. V. L. Grottanelli, *Missione di Studi al Lago Tana*, 2 vols., Rome, 1939.
10. J. Kalmer, 'The Return of Haile Selassié', *Contemporary Review*, vol. 159, pp. 290–4.
11. L. Meri, *Problema fondiario*, Rivista delle Colonie, Rome, 1937.
(For nos. 3, 4, and 5, see list of abbreviated references.)
In addition to these modern authors who give special consideration to land tenure, nearly all the travellers have something to say of the subject. While use has been made of these authorities, some of the information in this and the next chapter is based upon evidence collected directly from Ethiopians by F. de Halpert.

7: Perham S-4 (no date)1948
MP5 Amhara MP5

423 here there is no Domesday Book to give a clear point of departure and none of the successive unravellings of generations of scholars to help the inquirer. Any attempt at the simplification of the evidence must to some extent be a distortion.

[556] Two preliminary generalizations may help to clarify the picture.

Firstly it is important to remember that in Ethiopia, as in all economically backward countries where industry is negligible, almost all material wealth was the direct produce of the herdsman or the man who worked on the land with his plough and his hoe.

423 Ethiopia shared with the rest of tropical Africa a primitive peasant
466 agriculture; the difference was that there stood upon this basis a large
651 hierarchical structure of government. This meant that the cultivator
241 must, as the Ethiopians themselves express it, 'carry upon his shoulders' all that very large proportion of the population which had withdrawn themselves from work on the land. This included the Emperor; all his officials, central and provincial, great and small; the vast hierarchy of the church and the large armies of soldiers. As a result of the undeveloped economy and communications of Ethiopia, the services of the agriculturalist had for the most part to be used directly by the contribution of part of the crops or cattle from his own land or by the use of his labour upon that of another. While slave labour was widely used for domestic purposes, especially in the houses of the rich, it was not in the north used very extensively in the fields, and the main support of Ethiopian state and society was not the slave but the theoretically free cultivator, the *gabar*. The elaborate systems of land tenure and of tribute with all their provincial variations represent only the different means by which his services and produce were utilized by the government and by other classes. It was not the land but the labour of the *gabars* on the land which provided the support for provincial as well as imperial administration. Hence the importance of the forms of tenure and tribute.

423 The word *gabar* has been used as a term of reproach against Ethiopia.
466 At the end of these chapters on the provinces the reader will be in a
651 better position to judge how far this charge was just, and especially how far it accumulated evil association by the forms it assumed in the conquered south. Here the position of the northern *gabar* must be defined in its simplest terms. In theory and, at its best, in practice, the status was not synonymous with slavery or even with oppression. Literally it means one who pays *gibr* or tribute. 'There is no shame in the word "gabbar"' was the general Ethiopian opinion recorded by an observant British consul.[1] As tribute was in theory based upon land

[1] Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

7: Perham S-4 (no date)1948
MP5 Amhara MP5

not the person, it has been said that high notables and the Emperor himself might, in strict technicality, be called *gabars*, since they might hold land burdened with some *gabar* service. Moreover—again in the theory—*gabars* were not, like the serf, tied to the soil; they could leave their land and seek a new holding elsewhere.

The position can be put in another way. The Ethiopian, like the Englishman, owed dues to the central government or to its representative; firstly, he owed the Emperor tribute and tithe for his land; secondly, he owed the equivalent of local rates, and, thirdly, when he was a tenant, he owed rent. The only difference, it might be said, was that the Ethiopian paid all these dues in grain, honey, firewood, stock, or labour instead of in money. The difference was, however, fundamental. In the absence of central control or uniformity and in situations where the *gabar*, the man who provided all this tribute in kind with his own hands, happened to be in a weak position, the form of payment opened the way to all kinds of extortion.

Mrs. Sandford, who with her husband ran a farm for many years in Galla country near the capital and was therefore in a position to provide very authoritative evidence upon this subject, gives the following account of the *gabars*, presumably those in her district. They owed the governor or soldiers to whom they were allotted both produce and services: these might be one day's labour out of three, eight or ten days; the provision of timber for building the master's house and grass for its thatching; firewood and one fifth of the grain crop in addition to the Emperor's tenth. This, she concludes, might have been reasonable especially if the *gabars* could have dared to use their right of appeal. 'But in fact the abuse proved stronger than the system.' The masters exacted more than their due 'and the system was in practice as extortionate as those of old Roman days. Officer and soldier were equally rapacious, . . .' The *gabar* dared not appeal. Coming from a witness of such experience and of such devotion to Ethiopia, this evidence carries weight.[1]

The tithe of grain was owed to the Emperor by every subject unless he were exempted on account of his other services to state or church. This grain was collected on the threshing floors and stored in the governor's official granaries; it was used mainly for the sustenance of the soldiers. Since such a bulky product could hardly be carried far in Ethiopia there was very little market in cereals. Pastoral tribes were expected to pay their tithe in stock. There was also a tribute of produce or labour, or both, which was nearly always taken by the governor or his representative and there were further dues or presents to the sub-

[1] Sandford, pp. 48–9.

7: Perham S-4 (no date)1948
MP5 Amhara MP5

651 ordinate officials which varied from province to province. There were also the heavy dues of purveyance to passing officials, soldiers and even private travellers, whose records are full of evidence of the readiness with which through the centuries this burdensome obligation was accepted. Some of these dues were not easily to be distinguished from the further requirements in kind and in labour which a tenant might owe, in addition, as rent to a private landlord.

THE EMPEROR AND THE LAND

423 From the *gabar*, who formed the basis of the system of land tenure, we return to the Emperor at its apex. The conflict as to whether provincial office was held personally and terminally at the royal will was reproduced in the closely complementary question of the usage and ownership of land and its dues by which alone office could be supported. Here, in theory as well as in practice, the Emperor was less successful in maintaining his claims. It was true that land and office generally went together, but land-holding was wider than office-holding; it was more complex and it affected more people. Moreover, while office was highly desirable, the earth, meeting all necessities, was the main object and, once acquired, was held with the utmost tenacity.

423 643 The theory maintained by the Emperors was that they owned all the land in the country and that it was therefore all held at their will. 'He takes and gives all lands at pleasure' we read in Tellez.[1] 'The King's authority is so unlimited', wrote Lobo, 'that no Man can in this country be called with Justice Proprietor of anything, nor doth any Man when he Sows his Field know that he shall Reap it.'[2] Numerous authorities follow these early observers in this view. The assumption was that no land could be private property and therefore heritable. The most authoritative challenge to this theory was to be found in the ancient *Fetha Nagast* itself: in this, private property was formally recognized.[3] Turning to the latest age we find that a clause (article 27) of the constitution of 1931 runs as follows: 'Except in cases of public utility determined by law, no-one shall be entitled to deprive an Ethiopian subject of the movable or landed property which he holds.' Between these dates stretches the long struggle of the crown to counter these rights and to retain control over the lands granted out on various terms to the several categories of subjects.

[1] Tellez, p. 53.

[2] Lobo, J., *A Voyage to Abyssinia* (translated by Mr. Le Grand), 1735, p. 263.

[3] Guidi, p. 361. Quoted by M. de Coppet in Guèbrè Sellassié, vol. 2, p. 611.

7: Perham S-4 (no date)1948
MP5 Amhara MP5

THE NORTHERN PROVINCES: LAND TENURE

According to one legend, when Menelik I returned from his visit to his father Solomon, he divided the land into three parts, one for the crown, one for the church and the other for the laity. Certainly, as regards the first part of the division, the Emperors retained vast estates as the royal domain. These tended to be most numerous in the region of the imperial headquarters and became less so towards the periphery of the country. We saw in the chapter upon public finance that the estates from which it was possible to supply the royal household with grain, honey, *tej*, etc., were known as *mad-bet*. These estates included also wide pastoral areas which carried the royal herds. There were numerous large estates scattered about the country which the Emperor had granted to members of his own family and so long as these remained closely bound to him they were, politically, as useful as his personal domain.

From his royal domains the Emperor took all the produce that could be delivered to him. With the conquest of the southern lands and the arrival of the railway he was able to grow and to sell coffee. Outside his domains, in spite of his frequent claims, the Emperor was only able to make effective claim to waste, lapsed, conquered, and confiscated lands. Sometimes individuals or groups, holding private heritable land, would ask the Emperor to take it over as royal land in order to protect themselves from the rapacity of some local lord or the claims of some other group. In Dembea the people did this because the Emperor was allotting so much of their land to the churches against their will and they felt that if it was royal land he would not be so generous with it.[1] An unsuccessful rebellion would give an excellent opportunity for him to regain some of his lost land by means of confiscation. What he resumed with one hand he was always giving away with the other into what was in fact, if not in theory, private ownership. He still retained over this, of course, his rights to taxation. This consisted, as we have seen, in the tithe, a tenth of the produce, which was generally confined to grain, and to a land-tax which varied in amount and character from time to time and from place to place. He also reserved the right to make special levies.

Within the vast terminology referring to Ethiopian land tenure there are two terms which must be defined and kept before the reader. The one is *rest*, which means hereditary ownership, and the other is *gult* which describes land in which the Emperor had granted away some or all of his rights to tribute. (There is a conflict of authorities as to whether the Emperor had ever granted away his tithe as well as his tax upon *gult* land.) Clearly either of these kinds of tenure was very desirable;

[1] Rossini, pp. 104–5.

THE GOVERNMENT OF ETHIOPIA

423 when combined they represented the most coveted of all tenures as well as the one most weakening to the imperial authority.

From the different kinds of grant made to the various classes, the governors, the churches, the soldiers and others, for various purposes, arose the many categories of land tenure.

THE GOVERNOR AND THE LAND

635 651 661 423 The position of the provincial governor was relatively simple. He collected the whole of the Emperor's tribute within the province (in so far as this had not already been granted away by a process which will be examined presently), and he used it for the support of his administration, which meant of himself, his deputies, judges, messengers, and above all, the soldiery. As we have seen in the chapter upon public finance, it is impossible to generalize upon the proportion of tribute which the governor sent on to his Emperor except that it varied with the distribution of power at any given time between the two of them, and in the north might range from the refusal by a distant and almost autonomous governor to send anything but perhaps a token payment to the large tributes in kind and in money which are described by observers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

It is frequently stated in the European accounts of Ethiopia that the office of governor, like all other offices, was sold by the Emperor and by this method, injurious as it was, he would be sure of at least some return. He would also have an interest in frequent changes of office; the governor's interest would consequently be in extorting all he could from his province as rapidly as possible. 'They are generally more like robbers than governors', was the conclusion of one witness.[1] 'The governors purchase their Commissions, or to speak properly their privilege of pillaging the Provinces" concludes another.[2] 'You are governor of Ras el Feel', the Emperor's secretary announced to Bruce. 'I hope you will never see it. It is a hot, unwholesome country, full of Mahometans, but its gold is as good as any Christian gold whatever.'[3]

That these exactions continued into Haile Selassié's day was shown by the measures he took in his endeavours to reform the provincial administration. These exactions would certainly be less in the northern provinces where the governor was dealing with an ancient society, that of his own people, in which all relationships and tributes were sanctified by long established custom.

The governor would parcel out the tribute he controlled amongst his many lieutenants in the districts and amongst his own and the Emperor's

[1] Tellez, p. 53. [2] Lobo, *op. cit.*, p. 263. [3] Bruce, vol. 3, p. 365.

1 [not processed - Analyst]

7: Perham S-4 (no date)1948
MP5 Amhara MP5

soldiers. He would also have, like the Emperor, official estates set aside for the upkeep of his large household and it would be these he would be most anxious to retain if he lost his governorship. For these estates he could call up the labour of soldiers and *gabars*.[1] Parkyns recorded in the mid-nineteenth century that for his estates the governor could exact one day's work for clearing, one for sowing, two for cleaning, and two for harvesting, and this was still the custom in this century.[2] Instead of cultivating his estates directly by using labour in this way, the governor might lease his land to tenants who would pay him a stated proportion of the crop as rent. According to one authority in the north, governors claimed that one tenth of all privately owned land should also be cultivated for him and he would himself choose the lands. Where, as in Tigré, the governorship tended to remain for a period in the same family this was not so grave an injury to the province, but if a governor from outside were sent in the people might not dare to demand back the lands from the local family and were obliged to set aside new lands for their new governor.[3] Besides the governor's estates there would be others attached to the various offices of his assistants.

In addition to their more regular dues from the people it was customary for governors and their assistants to demand special gifts from time to time, such as a sheep from each village at Easter and at the festival of the true cross.

THE CHURCH AND THE ARMY

The Emperors were always extremely generous to the church, even if they had not gone so far as to allocate that third of the original legend which the famous cleric Takla Haimanot claimed in 1270. Every priest, monk, *debtera*, and deacon, in so far as he was excused from the work of the fields, required that land furnished with slaves or *gabars* should be set aside for his support. A vast total of land was burdened with this service. The piety of Emperors warred here with their political interests—at one moment they were moved to give, at another to resume their gifts. But it was not easy to assert the royal claim against monasteries which were undying corporations or against churches which needed permanent endowment and were, moreover, served by priests determined to pass on their lands with their offices to their sons. Moreover, the very character of the grants protected them. Their most

[1] Walker, *op. cit.*, pp. 189–91.

[2] Parkyns, M., *Life in Abyssinia*, 1853, vol. 2, p. 230. Also Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

[3] Rossini, pp. 107–8.

7: Perham S-4 (no date)1948
MP5 Amhara MP5

frequent form was that of *samonanya*, lands given to support the service of the mass. The Emperors had granted much *gult* to the churches and thus gave them the power to keep all the royal tribute from it and even to administer justice and to retain its proceeds. Even where this grant had not been made as *rest-gult* it was not easy to regain control of it and the convention was that, when such land was taken back by the Emperor, an equivalent estate should be granted.[1]

It should be remembered that land was not held collectively by the church but, as in England, by the individual 'parish' churches or monasteries or by the Abuna and the *Ichegé*, who between them held very large estates, and by other ecclesiastics.

Military service, regarded in this chapter from the aspect of land tenure, was a universal obligation upon land unless the land was held by the church and specially exempted. The obligation was on the land rather than on the person, so that if a woman held a piece of land which had to supply soldiers it was her duty to raise and equip them. There were many different kinds of military tenure because each type of service was attached to special pieces of land and called by different names which need not be listed here. There was, for example, land which supplied the following services—the fusilier, the artilleryman, the muleteer, the porter transporting baggage, the bearer of the red tent or the Emperor's tent poles, the makers of gunpowder, the quartermaster, the forager, and many other military needs. It was even specially laid down for each piece of land whether its soldiers should fight in the centre or the left or right wings of the army.[2]

Estates would have to give the service of soldiers in varying numbers from the single man to a thousand or more. Those who owed these large numbers were, of course, very important people, and in Shoa at least it was probable that the man liable for a thousand would be a holder of *gult* over a considerable area.[3] Parcels of land might be allotted to 'regular' soldiers to support them while on service, or given as a reward for service, generally with a continuing obligation to provide a soldier of some special type.

It will be seen that there was no uniform system for the raising or support of the soldiers, especially as these were serving different masters. Thus in one province there might be part of the Emperor's army as well as the governor's provincial army, while both the latter and his district governors would have their personal bodyguards. Though in the north the serving soldiers were generally supported out of the tithes, they might be quartered directly upon the people or given lands of their

[1] Guèbrè Sellassié, vol. 2, pp. 611–13. [2] Walker, *op. cit.*, pp. 189–90.
[3] Guèbrè Sellassié, vol. 2, p. 612; also de Castro, pp. 281 ff.

own. The soldier was generally freed from all taxes except the tithe and this might be excused where he provided his own horse and weapons. 701 [651]

Not only was there great variety in the arrangements but they were by no means static even in the conservative north. An example of this may be given from Gojjam. Here under Ras Hailu and his father, the *Negus* Tekla Haimanot, the soldiers were simply local men who, being exempted from tithes and other dues to the government, cultivated their own land and did three months' service a year at the governor's headquarters. After Ras Hailu's rebellion and his deposition in 1932 on grounds of misrule, Ras Imru, the Emperor's kinsman, was sent in his place. Although he was said to be a much more enlightened governor, the people murmured because he brought with him his 'foreign' Shoan army which oppressed the *gabars* who had to support it. This is an example of how, in the face of the complexities of the social situation, an ostensibly reforming measure might be frustrated.

PRIVATE TENURE

The main forces by which land and tribute were held by what may be called the public elements of the national life of Ethiopia, the Emperor, the church, the governor and his assistants, and the soldiers, have been very briefly indicated. The picture, even in this outline form, would not be complete without some reference to tenure by private persons, especially by those small farmers and peasant cultivators by whose work the rest were nourished. 423

The position of the *gabar* has been defined in relation to the rest of the community. When, in the northern provinces, we examine this class in their own right we find that it presented the most enduring strands in the texture of Ethiopian society and that its composition leads us back to the tribal past.

Over large parts of the northern provinces, especially those that were not too seriously disturbed or overlaid by Galla invasions, the land was held by groups of peasant holders, generally under the leadership of one or more families, and any inquiries about their origin would lead almost at once to romantic personal stories that may date, or appear to date, from some centuries before. These stories would explain how that group had come to be where it was and how its forefathers had first occupied the land. 423 621

These groups held by *rest*, that is, by hereditary right. They held as a group which had preserved some of the close ties of an original kinship group even though in the course of time it had absorbed many

7: Perham S-4 (no date)1948
MP5 Amhara MP5

'foreigners', and even though, within the group ownership, there was individual and family ownership of the land.

The allocation of and the succession to the land was governed by ancient custom. This custom varied greatly because, as d'Abbadie said, 'In Ethiopia one of the despairs of the traveller, who thinks he knows the country, is to discover, sometimes by chance, that such and such a community, comprising a family, a part of a village, or district is of a different origin from the population which surrounds it.' In internal land and family matters, it would keep its own private law.[1] In some communities there were meetings at fixed intervals of three to seven years according to the region and at which the reallocation between families of the different types of land, which was in several categories according to its fertility, was arranged. Apart from these adjustments by agreement, land went from father to son. Land transactions were announced by the public crier and registered, generally by entry in a Bible or other book, in the 'parish' church. The penal code of 1930 decreed up to three years' imprisonment for failure to register transactions in hereditary land,[2] but this decree may not have been fully effective in the provinces by 1935. Transactions were always carried out before witnesses. These sometimes included young children who might be given a feast of the delicacy of fried grain in order to fix the event in their memories.

Landmatters, indeed, were settled within such land-holding groups with little intervention from higher authority so long as all its members gave what was due to the government or to the representative of the government. Their relations with this representative would be through their family and the heads of their family group and it is obvious that a community with this degree of autonomy in the vital matters of land and tribute, in addition to the minor legislative and judicial powers already described,[3] might be regarded as largely self-governing in local matters. Such *restenya*, or hereditary land-holders, were further fortified in their position by the recognition of private property in the *Fetha Nagast*. In Menelik's later days, his council confirmed this position by a decree in which it was promised that except in cases of rebellion and treason even criminals should not be dispossessed from such tenure.[4] This provision was repeated in clause 9 of the penal code of 1930. It is probable that it was unbroken settlement by an Amhara tribal community which alone could offer effective resistance to royal and other pressure.

The Emperor would, however, seize every opportunity of breaking

[1] d'Abbadie, *op. cit.*, p. 90. [2] Clause 458. [3] See above, p. 142.
[4] Guèbrè Sellassié, vol. 2, p. 611.

7: Perham S-4 (no date)1948
MP5 Amhara MP5

down the resistance of the undisturbed customary societies in favour of his own centralized control. Thus in Wallo, an ancient Galla region, the people had been organized into seven districts under the rule of seven of the original families. When Menelik first wrested its allegiance from John he had to conciliate these local leaders, but later, when he became stronger, he weakened them and had the land measured and more evenly distributed. In 1916 when the *Negus* Mikael was defeated after an attempt to rebel, Wallo was parcelled out under generals, and soldiers were put in by the central government.

MEASUREMENT AND INHERITANCE

Before concluding this general account some answer must be given to the questions as to whether there was any survey and registration and what were the rules of inheritance?

There was, of course, no survey as the term is understood in England. There was a measurement, a *gasha*, which was the equivalent of 80 to 100 acres, and in some parts of the country and notably, as we shall see, in parts of the conquered south the land had been measured. In Ethiopian terms, 'the cord had been thrown', sometimes once and sometimes a second time, with more accuracy, after the land had been cleared and farmed. Measurement of the land gave the Emperor and his officers greater control over it and its resources and the prime mover in this process had been Menelik.

In the north, measurement has been by no means universal. In Gojjam, most stubborn and independent of provinces, and in Bagemdir there was no general measurement of land. In other northern provinces it appears that when estates were granted in recent times by the Emperor, especially those in *rest-gult* tenure, they were measured and registered. Small estates and the lands held by groups of *restenyas*, divided and at times redivided, were distinguished by natural landmarks and registered in men's minds or they might be entered into parish registers. The new land-tax of 1944 was based upon the unit of the *gasha*, but it is very doubtful whether measurement had been sufficiently carried through by this date to make it possible to execute the law upon this basis.

With regard to inheritance, we have seen that this was only held to be permissible for *rest* land though in fact it was far more widely applied. It was not permissible to leave land away from the family or the group, or equally to give or sell it, without the permission of those chiefly interested. In leaving land the owner could allocate as much as two thirds to his favourite child—and in some parts this could be a daughter—while the rest was divided equally between the other children.

7: Perham S-4 (no date)1948
MP5 Amhara MP5

THE GOVERNMENT OF ETHIOPIA

THREE LOCAL EXAMPLES OF TENURE

423 634 Three local examples will illustrate tenure. The first is from Gojjam under Ras Hailu.[1] The province was divided into fourteen districts. Most of these were in turn divided into two or three sub-districts. In each of the fourteen districts was a district governor (*abagaz*), who generally bore the title of *dejazmach*, and an assistant or deputy (*Mislané*). These men, appointed solely at the governor's will, were in general charge of the administration and jurisdiction of the district. Beside them functioned the *gulta gaji*, who was always a local man whose title was hereditary in certain families. He oversaw the collection of taxes, settled small cases between the *gabars*, and acted as liaison between the government and the people. He appointed as assistants a *chiqa-shum* for each village-group, an office which was held for a year and rotated among heads of families.

651 The list of the tributes paid to the various officials is very indefinite as to the amount and is of value only as indicating very generally the complexity of the system rather than the exact weight of the burden carried by the peasantry or the proportions taken by the different officers. Taxes and payments were divided as follows between the various authorities.

Government	Tithe in grain.
	Tax of $2 on each pair of oxen.
	afarsata fines.[2]
	Tax of $1 on each hut.
Abagaz (district governor)	Court Fees.
	Labour dues.
	Dues for use by men and cattle of warm mineral springs.
Mislané (deputy)	*Irbo* (a proportion of the government tax paid in kind).
	A proportion of the court fees paid to the *abagaz*.
	Labour dues.
Gulta gaji (hereditary chief)	A proportion of the grain crop of his district.
Chiqa-shum (village head)	His reward was exemption from taxation during year of office.[3]

[1] From information obtained locally by F. de Halpert. [2] See p. 149.

[3] It may be of some slight help in interpreting the money payments to note that the penal code of 1930 equates a quarter of a dollar with one day's work of an unskilled labourer. (Clause 6.)

7: Perham S-4 (no date)1948

MP5 Amhara MP5

THE NORTHERN PROVINCES: LAND TENURE

The taxation in Gojjam was probably lighter than elsewhere, since, as has just been explained, soldiers were paid here by means of exemption from taxation.

In a study of the system round Lake Tana, mainly in Bagemdir, an Italian writer notes how, side by side with the groups of *restenyas* tracing their hereditary occupation to the first settlements, probably in the fifteenth century, other tenures had grown up. One was that of the *farasenya*[1] to whom the Emperor had made grants of certain privileges and payments amounting generally to about a tenth of the produce of the *restenya* and also the right to exact labour for his land and house and collective gifts upon important feast days. Similar rights, but not including administrative powers, were given to *gultenyas* who, while collecting all the dues owed to the government, had to pay to it an agreed quota of oxen, mules, honey, etc. Thirdly there were the grants of *maskal mariet* (lands of the cross) to the church. In all these cases the rights were often given over the heads of the *restenyas*, who would continue to cultivate their lands as before. As there might be superimposition of new rights over old at the top, there might also be added lower stages by the leasing of land by *restenyas* and others to tenants who would have to pay rent as well as tax.

Side by side with these holders of what may be regarded as private rights would be the hierarchy of the governor. The private rights might cut like islands into the administrative area of his district governors or these might be the *gultenyas* or *farasenyas* themselves and so eliminate the dualism. The *chiqa-shum* who collected the tax would thus pay it either to the *Mislané*, the *gultenya*, the *farasenya* or the *alaqa* (head) of the church. The writer condemns the cumbrousness of this method, with its encouragement of peculation and exactions. The original tax of the people was one tenth of their crop, but the feudal organization had resulted in a multiplication of intermediaries whose great object was to pass on less than a tenth to the government and to exact more than a tenth from the people, enriching themselves on the margin of differences. Those who suffered most were some of the *gabars* who had to support both the church and the *farasenyas*.

An Italian writing of Ethiopian abuses and Italian reforms in 1937 is not likely to underrate the vices of the old system, but there is plenty of comparative evidence, as well as the laws of probability, to suggest that he has not greatly darkened his picture. He states that under the Italian Government, after the conquest, the upper part of the structure[2]

[1] Literally 'horseman' and corresponding, apparently, to the early English 'knight'.

[2] Grottanelli, *op. cit.*, vol. 2. pp. 14–15. 105–12.

7: Perham S-4 (no date)1948
MP5 Amhara MP5

had been removed, leaving the heads of villages and districts in direct contact with the Italian resident.

Our third example comes from Eritrea. No excuse is needed for this excursion beyond the present borders of Ethiopia, since the Eritrean plateau was until fifty years ago a part, and one of the oldest parts, of the Ethiopian state, and this region may again revert to its former status. In addition, however, we have the great advantage that Dr. Nadel, an anthropologist of experience and authority, has had the opportunity in this region under the British military administration to make a thorough investigation of a land tenure closely resembling that of northern Ethiopia.[1]

On the Eritrean plateau the most characteristic unit was the *enda*, a number of families which claimed to have descended from a single ancestor. This group was not static; it might decline or be dispersed, or it might thrive and reach a size when it became necessary to break up and form new *endas*. It was not an administrative unit, but in certain matters it acted as a unity through meetings of its elders. The administrative unit, the village, generally covered several *endas*, though these may have all descended from a parent *enda*. The village unit might also cut across *endas*.

Above the village administrations, in the days before the Italian conquest, came the hierarchy of the Emperor, his governors and deputy governors. These were often strangers from the south though local chiefs might be promoted to imperial positions. The imperial taxation had to be delivered to these officers, and the Emperor might arbitrarily cut out estates in *gult* for their support, or for that of monasteries or colonies of soldiers posted in these outlying regions to support the Emperor's power.

These rights may be regarded as extraneous to the underlying customary tenures which are divided by Dr. Nadel into three, ownership by the individual (which generally meant the individual family); by the kindred, or *enda*, and by the village. The first two types of ownership might, owing to the blurring of the edges between the three groups by growth or decline, shade off into each other.

In his discussion of family ownership Dr. Nadel gives us an authoritative definition of *resti*, which may cover ownership ranging from that of an individual to that of a large kinship group. This tenure was held by the people to be the most fundamental and sacred, and its characteristics were firstly its relative absoluteness; secondly its hereditary nature,

[1] Nadel, S. F., 'Land Tenure on the Eritrean Plateau', *Africa*, vol. 16, nos. 1 and 2, pp. 1–22, 99–109. The succeeding pages are closely based on this concise report.

and thirdly its derivation from the rights of some forefather who first took possession of the land. 423

Where the *resti* land was still held by a large kindred group, the individual family had a secondary or derived ownership of a piece of land adequate to meet its needs. When a son married and set up house he applied through his father to the council which allocated a plot to him within the kindred land. Thus the hereditary right was to land within that of the *enda*, not necessarily to a particular piece of land. Sons and, in certain conditions, daughters would inherit their father's rights. Before a man could give or sell his share of land he must offer it first to members of his *enda* and then to those of his village, and this restriction might apply to a subsequent sale of the land. It seems that in some parts the control of the *enda* council was even stricter and that the individual had no more than a very restricted usufruct, with frequent reallocation by lot. 423 428

The complexities of land tenure have only to be defined in these general terms to make it necessary to list numerous qualifications and apparent inconsistencies. These cannot all be given here. Mention must, however, be made of the system of village ownership, which, as a result largely of later immigration and of heavy pressure upon the land, had in some parts overlaid or ousted the *enda* ownership and the principle of *resti*. In these units (the development of which, though not begun by the Italian Government, was encouraged by it), the village council made an equal division of its lands, which were allocated by lot in three categories according to fertility, to all inhabitants of the village, whether *restenyas* or not. There was a redistribution at periods ranging from three to seven years. Village ownership appears to have been more just and flexible than that of the *enda*, though it is not clear how it dealt with improvements and permanent crops. 423

From the social aspect it is interesting to learn that everywhere, even where village ownership had deprived the *restenyas* of their special privileges with regard to land, their personal prestige remained. The *restenyas* were the people of superior status who, however small their holdings, could claim to belong to families which descended from the first family to hold the land. This gave them a peculiar status; it endowed them with a primacy in the local councils and even, in some parts, with certain small dues and privileges; it is from their ranks alone that the village chief, the *chiqa-shum*, was chosen. 423 554

In addition to these main forms of ownership the *restenyas* could create subsidiary forms by leasing or lending their land or, especially in the case of large and absentee landlords, by introducing a number of tenants to farm their land and pay with their services, the landlord 427

7: Perham S-4 (no date)1948
MP5 Amhara MP5

427 paying the tribute for these *gabars*. (This method was also very common in Ethiopia proper.) There might also be forms of métayer contract. It need hardly be said that, after very long tenure, a tenant would try to claim that his land was *resti*, and that, with the growing shortage of land, numerous disputes resulted.

427 177 One of the main interests of Dr. Nadel's valuable analysis of Eritrean land tenure is that it shows the Ethiopian system as it was after half a century of Italian rule and as it is now under a British administration. The Italians swept away the upper parts of the structure except in so far as they allowed favoured chiefs to hold their old large estates, but at a lower level the system has been little changed. British administrators—who, of course, must act with the restraint of temporary caretakers—found their main problems arising from the intense, indeed passionate, competition for the inadequate amount of land which leads to numerous and long-drawn-out disputes. The Eritreans are proud of their land law, but to the European observer the lack of finality in their disputes and the great difficulty of obtaining any implementation of the decisions either of arbitrators or of native courts are great obstacles to the proper development of the land. But the difficulties with regard to tenure are, in all probability, much wider than legal questions and arise from the strain which the changing use of land is putting upon all customary African tenures.

423 Another most interesting conclusion drawn by Dr. Nadel is that the stubborn pride and conservatism of the *restenyas*, who cling to all their privileges with a fierce tenacity, represent a social evil. He speaks of the narrow exclusiveness of the system and its rigid political and economic privileges. 'It excludes large sections of the population permanently from a share in the administration of their own communities and keeps them in a state of dependence and economic insecurity. . . . To-day we are facing not merely the economic system of *resti* but a *resti* mentality.'[1] If this is true of that part of Ethiopia where both migrations and Italian policy have weakened this system, it is likely that in northern Ethiopia the problem is presented in even more rigid and difficult terms. But this, again, is only one illustration of the widespread African problem of harmonizing the existing tenurial rights of the original land-holders with the interests of the population as a whole.

[1] *Ibid.*, no. 2, p. 108.

[pp. 293 ff. not processed]